

## Women's Health

Less than one hundred years ago, women did not have the right to vote in our nation. Today, the governor of our state is a woman, as are our two outstanding U.S. Senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell. Clearly, great strides have been made in women's rights, but there is yet much to be done. Sexual assault and domestic violence are still too common, diseases such as breast and cervical cancer claim too many lives, and there continue to be unjust pay differences between women and men who perform the same work.

These challenges must be addressed and solved and I am committed to helping make that happen. I also believe strongly that woman's basic rights to make decisions about their own lives and bodies should not be infringed upon by the government. I believe we must do everything we can to encourage responsible sexual behavior, including abstinence, and we should ensure that women have access to affordable contraception. For those who are faced with unplanned pregnancies, we need to offer support through prenatal care and, later, through day care. At the same time, however, we must also preserve women's rights to have medically safe, legal abortion. Beyond our own borders, we should also support women's health and rights and continue to participate actively in family planning initiatives, including responsible sex education and international family planning.

### Domestic Violence

Congressman Baird believes no woman should live in fear in her home or community. He strongly supported the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), legislation which increased funding for domestic violence prevention and prosecution, women's shelters and services, education and prevention grants, and child abuse programs. Congressman Baird has also cosponsored the Domestic Violence Screening, Treatment, and Prevention Act. This bill would encourage every health care provider to routinely screen women over 18 years old for signs of domestic violence; provide states with the option to cover domestic violence screening and treatment services under Medicaid; provide grants to train health professionals to assess women for signs of abuse; and establish family violence research and education centers.

### Family Planning, Responsible Behavior, and Abortion Rights

Congressman Baird supports family planning initiatives and ensuring that women have access to affordable contraceptives. It is well documented that effective family planning efforts improve pre and postnatal care, reduce the numbers of

unwanted pregnancies and abortions, and enhance the health of women in our own country and internationally. Congressman Baird also believes we should encourage young people to practice abstinence and that we must do more to emphasize the necessity for men to conduct themselves responsibly in their relationships. When unintended pregnancies do occur, to improve the care of women and infants we should make prenatal care universally available and, for those who choose, we should make adoptions easier and more affordable.

While doing everything we can to promote responsible behavior and reduce unplanned pregnancies, Congressman Baird understands that the decision to have an abortion is one of the most emotional and private dilemmas a woman can face. Congressman Baird believes this is a decision that should be made by the woman herself, not by the government. There is much that can be done to reduce abortions and improve the health and care of women and children, but government should not intrude on the bodies and the most important personal decisions women make. That is why the Congressman believes abortions should be safe, legal, and as rare as possible.

### Female Genital Cutting

Female genital cutting (FGC) is a traditional cultural practice that ranges from nicking to total removal of the external female genitalia. FGC is typically carried out on young girls between the ages of 4 and 12, and 100-180 million women have undergone FGC worldwide. Reasons for its practice include beliefs about health and hygiene, women's sexuality, and rites of passage to adulthood and community initiative rites. The practice harms women's health, causing serious pain, trauma, and frequently severe physical complications such as bleeding, infections, or even death. FGC occurs predominantly in Africa, although it has been documented in Asia, the Middle East, and among African immigrant communities in Europe, North America, and Australia.

In recent years there has been widespread recognition that FGC directly affects the health and well-being of women and whole societies, resulting in considerable demand on the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other donors to address the issue. Many African nations, women's organizations, the World Health Organization, and USAID have developed agendas to eradicate FGC. Congressman Baird supports legislation to eliminate this dangerous and harmful practice.

### Equal Pay for Equal Work

President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act on June 10, 1963. Yet four decades after its passage, women still earn only about 76% of what men earn. Women of color are worse off: African American women make 69 cents on the dollar compared to the highest earners, while Hispanic women make only 56 cents.

Congressman Baird believes it is wrong to pay two equally qualified people different wages for the same work. To this end, he has cosponsored the Paycheck Fairness Act. This legislation would strengthen the enforcement provisions and allow for tougher penalties for violations under the existing Equal Pay Act. It would provide training, research and education, and recognize model employers. Congressman Baird will continue to support equal pay for equal work legislation because it is not only important for women presently in the workforce, but also for future

generations.

#### Mail-Order Brides

The use of international marriage broker (IMB) services has exploded in recent years with the growth of the Internet. While many of these matches result in happy unions, there is a disturbing trend of domestic abuse among couples who meet via international marriage brokers.

To combat this problem, Congressman Baird has cosponsored the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act. This legislation seeks to better inform women entering this country about the past history of their prospective spouse, and better inform them of their rights as residents of the United States if they become victims of domestic violence.

#### The Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act

Thousands of women each year are forced to leave the hospital sometimes only hours after a mastectomy, still in pain and groggy with anesthesia. Despite the fact that the American College of Surgeons and the American Medical Association believe that most patients require a longer length of stay, so-called "drive-through" mastectomies are the reality for women battling breast cancer and can cause dramatic physical and emotional damage. Congressman Baird is a cosponsor of The Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act, which will ensure that the length of stay in the hospital post-mastectomy surgery is a decision made by the patient and her doctor.

#### The Assure Access to Mammography Act

Screening mammograms can cost as much as \$150. Unfortunately, Medicare's reimbursement rate, which often serves as the benchmark for those of other providers, is currently set at about \$82. This disparity has led many private mammography centers to shut down, creating a shortage of providers. In some areas, women have to wait as long as six months for this lifesaving exam.

Congressman Baird is a cosponsor of the Assure Access to Mammography Act, which would increase Medicare reimbursements to radiologists; increase the number of radiologists; and provide a study on Medicare reimbursement for screening services. With a huge access problem looming on the horizon, Congressman Baird believes comprehensive steps must be taken to ensure women can get the care they need.

#### Security and Financial Empowerment Act

Violence has been reported to be the leading cause of physical injury to women. While the physical and emotional effects of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking are well documented, little attention has been paid

to the severe economic consequences of these types of abuse. Currently, battered women are not expressly allowed by federal law to take leave from work for the purpose of dealing with domestic violence, nor are employers mandated to provide unemployment compensation for victims who lose their jobs due to circumstances resulting from abuse.

Congressman Baird is a cosponsor of legislation to address these issues by promoting financial security for victims of abuse. The Security and Financial Empowerment Act allows a victim to take time off from work without penalty from her employer to make necessary court appearances, seek legal assistance, and get help with safety planning. It ensures that battered women can retain the financial independence necessary to leave their abusers without having to rely on welfare.

## UNFPA

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the world's largest international source of funding for population and reproductive health programs. Since it began operations in 1969, the Fund has provided nearly \$6 billion in assistance to developing countries. UNFPA works with governments and non-governmental organizations in over 140 countries, at their request, and with the support of the international community. They support programs that help women, men and young people plan their families and avoid accidental pregnancies, undergo pregnancy and childbirth safely, avoid sexually transmitted diseases, and combat violence against women.

Congressman Baird believes that global population stabilization and the improved status of women are extremely important. That is why he is a cosponsor of the UNFPA Funding Act. This legislation would authorize the appropriation of over \$100 million to be available for United States voluntary contributions to the United Nations Population Fund. It is imperative that the United States assist developing nations to control their skyrocketing populations through family planning and educational programs.

## Contraception Coverage in Insurance

Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, and half of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion. While contraceptives have a proven track record of protecting the health of women, preventing unintended pregnancies, and reducing the need for abortion, the majority of employment-related insurance policies in the United States do not cover this basic health care for women.

Congressman Baird believes that in order to prevent unintended pregnancies we must support family planning initiatives and give women and their families affordable access to contraceptives. That is why he is a cosponsor of the Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage (EPICC) Act. This legislation would require insurance plans that already cover prescription drugs and devices to cover contraceptives. Furthermore, plans that include coverage for outpatient medical services would be required to cover outpatient contraceptive services. Baird will work to rectify current inequities by ensuring that contraceptives are covered on par with other prescription drugs.

## Title IX

Title IX was passed in 1972 to ensure that the federal government delivers on the Constitution's promise of parity so that every individual is able to develop his or her talents. In terms of gaining equality for women, much has been accomplished in the classroom and on the playing field. Women now make up the majority of students in America's colleges and universities, in addition to making up the majority of recipients of master's degrees. The many gains that have been made in giving women new opportunities to advance their education have had a direct impact on opening up new professions and giving women the opportunity to seek employment in nontraditional fields.

In addition, Title IX has helped young women participate in interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics in far greater numbers than they had in the past. Today, more than 100,000 women participate in intercollegiate athletics, a fourfold increase since 1971. In fact, girls and women are increasingly participants in sports that have traditionally been seen as out-of-bounds for women.

While civil rights laws have historically been a powerful mechanism for affecting social change in the United States, too many women still confront the problem of sexual harassment, still lag behind men in earnings, and have 38.4% less participation opportunities than men at the collegiate level. Congressman Baird is working to ensure that the strength of Title IX is not diminished.

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